

Jumpin' at the Friedman August 29

How about some hot jazz for a hot summer's day? The following is a loving memoir of an NSA musical group no longer in existence. It was written a now-retired Air Force officer who wrote a number of articles in the past for the Center for Cryptologic History. This version has been slightly truncated from an article he wrote in 2005. Here is Vic's story:

Did you know that NSA had its very own jazz band for almost fifty years? It has been over two decades since "our" band last played *Avalon*, *Chicago*, and *Back Home Again in Indiana*. However, if you walk past the Friedman Auditorium at noon on any given Tuesday, you might hear the faint echoes of those tunes in the cryptologic ether, emanating from the shades of the Tuesday Nooners Jazz Band -- the TNJB.

It all began during World War II at Arlington Hall Station. Two young guys who would eventually become preeminent cryptologists -- Ed Fishel and Jack (we called him Jake) Gurin -- formed the band to entertain themselves and a few of their colleagues during the lunch hour once a week and, on many occasions, after work.

Ed and Jake played traditional jazz, or Dixieland if you prefer, and they played it well. I know. I joined the group in 1959, some 16 years after Jazz at the Cryptologia first began.

Ed was a cigar-smoking piano player who wore Groucho glasses. His shuffling lope as he walked down the corridors of NSA was but one of his many oddities. A few years before his death, he published THE seminal work on cryptology during the Civil War,* but his heart always belonged in a smoke-filled gin mill with a good band sitting on rickety chairs, feet stomping, eyes closed, beer warming. I know. I did that with him more times than I can remember.

Jake Gurin didn't smoke, but he did wear the exact same type of glasses as his friend, and he, too, was a consummate jazz musician. Jake played string bass, trombone, and classical violin. Jake and Ed both were both serious about jazz, and were also founding members of the Potomac River Jazz Club in 1971, which

remains quite active to this day. For years Ed published *Tailgate Ramblings*, the official jazz rag for the greater Washington, D.C., area for years now.



The TNJB is pictured playing for a Baltimore United Appeal rally in October 1965. Pictured are Donn Andre, banjo; Martin Bertsch, drums; Jon Hebhardt, alto sax; Tom Bednar, bass; Richard Tubbs, tenor sax; Edwin Fishel, piano; Jack Gurin, trombone; and Kenny Fulcher, trumpet.

The first Tuesday I had my clearance, in March 1959, Second Lieutenant Brown -- that's me -- was walking past the NSA auditorium (later to be named after the Friedmans), when I heard the strains of *O' Didny Ramble* all but pushing the doors open. Having led a Dixieland band for four years in

college, I dove into the auditorium as if the Pied Piper of Cryptology had been playing

lead horn. And he was, actually. His name was Kenny Fulcher, named THE best unknown trumpet player in the land by *Downbeat Magazine*. You might remember him: trim mustache, walked with admirable courage using two crutches, having been born with polio, which crippled his legs. But not his heart ... or his chops. Kenny lifted every other musician he ever encountered, causing them to play better than they thought they could. I know; it happened to me a lot.

We had a string section. Donn Andre shared banjo duties with Don Heneberry. Good Dixieland and banjos go together like a Guhor stick and basic station trinomes. I know: I used to have one. We had more reeds than Carter made Little Liver Pills. Dick Tubbs played alto sax, sort of, but he could sing back alley blues like a low-down, hard-luck, brother-can-you-spare-a-dime, gutbucket, moochin' side-door Pullman car hobo. The "sax section" was ably filled out by the studious, bespectacled, full-bearded Henry Jerzierski on tenor. Joe Gaffney was the TNJB's original clarinetist, followed by John Skillman, who doubled on banjo. Jack Sharretts also played clarinet for a short period. I finally replaced "the gang" on clarinet after returning from several back-to-back PCS assignments. In a business

like NSA, with frequent transfers of personnel, you had to be almost three-deep at every instrument. Tom Bednar played upright bass when Jake was TDY, and Marty Bertsch blew drums, sharing the sticks with Ken McVicker. No few times we would have a dozen jazz men wailing away, which brought the curtain down on any activities in the meditation center back of the auditorium.

And speaking of audiences... We were favorites of every director from Canine on, especially Marshall Carter. For decades we were sent out as cryptologic ambassadors - about the only unclassified group that did that, other than maybe the Parkway Chorale. I couldn't tell you how many times we played at posh hotels in Baltimore for the kickoff of the Combined Federal Campaign, Red Cross functions, director's Christmas parties, awards ceremonies, along with wakes and balloon ascensions. (Jazz musicians have vivid imaginations. We have to; we never use "charts," i.e., written music. Like, man, we improvise.)

Each DIRNSA would provide us with a traveling bus, two security officers (maybe they were afraid we might play some classified tunes?), and an MC, usually a jazz buff named Chuck Kennedy. He was our announcer extraordinaire, coordinator with the Ninth Floor, booking agent, musical critic, and good friend. It was his job to keep us sober, too.

The time came when we began to suffer permanent attrition, however. In fairly rapid succession the two founders retired, and Kenny Fulcher was killed in a car accident. That tore the heart out of the Tuesday Nooners, and stilled those wonderful sounds that used to waft down the corridors of the OPS-1 building, stilled the Trad Jazz that had so long been a part of the great traditions of NSA.

I'm the last of the TNJB still around (back as a reservist). I'll bet there's still a set of drums and traps along with a string bass in the NSA closet, not to mention that battered old piano - the one scarred with Ed Fishel's cigar burns. Who knows, we could blow a little *O Didny Ramble* ... just for old time's sake.

A slight correction to Vic's article: Ed Fishel wrote the first major study of Civil War intelligence from all sources, *The Secret War for the Union*. Noncirculating copies are available at the National Cryptologic Museum library.